

Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

TUBS, ARCHAIC DECENCIES, AND THE "SPOON RIVER ANTHOLOGY"

SIR,—In a review of Mr. Edgar Lee Master's *Spoon River Anthology* ("The Book of the Month"—NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW), Mr. Lawrence Gilman, after having forgiven Whitman his crudities and his cataloguings for the sake of the pleasant oases that refresh the reader of his poems, remarks that "There are no such compensations in Mr. Master's verse"; and he closes with this thrust at Mr. Master's style: "But why drag in poetry?" —whatever he means by "Poetry" (if he doesn't use, he invokes, the capital) a sacred jar of dead rose petals, withered mystery, glass-cased, and wound away in mummy-cloths from the rude hands of reason;—as who should scrutinize a painting through his eye-glass and then remark, "Very pretty, but why call it a picture?"

As to the lack of compensation in Mr. Master's verse, I should like to hear what reasons one who doesn't like Deacon Taylor's "cirrhosis of the liver" can adduce for denying "unexcelled imaginative justness of language" to these lines from "Thomas Trevelyan":

> "Livers and artists of Hellas centuries gone,
> Sealing in little thuribles dreams and wisdom,
> Incense beyond all price, forever fragrant,
> A breath whereof makes clear the eyes of the soul!"

or to these from the solemn retrospect of William Herndon:

> "And I saw the figures of the past,
> As if in a pageant glassed by a shining dream,
> Move through the incredible sphere of time."

The quiet close of the poem evoking this image, like a grave coda:

> "Often and often I saw you
> As the cawing crows winged their way to the wood
> Over my house-top at solemn sunsets,
> There by my window,
> Alone."

Griffy the Cooper, though less conventional in speech than the gentlemen I have quoted, expresses, I think, as much poetry as pertinent good sense when he says:

> "You are submerged in the tub of yourself—
> Taboos and rules and appearances
> Are the staves of your tub.
> Break them and dispel the witchcraft
> Of thinking your tub is life!
> And that you know life!"

The public has simply got to break the staves and dispel the witchcraft of thinking its tub is art, and that it knows art: of assuming that literary style is more fixed than style of manner or of dress. Just as the speech of different generations and of different individuals varies according to the change of the times and the variations of personality, so the speech of literature evolves and varies—the writers of each period developing new from old, or, like Wordsworth, shattering the old, to blow new bottles for new wine. Take the "Spooniad" conceived and partly executed by "the late Mr. Jonathan Swift Somers" in mongrel blank verse—who in the world, do you think, would read an entire *Spoon River Anthology* so presented, or put out in the manner of Browning's *Men and Women*, admirable

as that manner was for Browning's purpose? It could be done, more or less, no doubt of it, but with what inevitably grotesque effect, with what evaporation of that quality which, as Mr. Gilman confesses, "seizes you, engrosses you, haunts you." This sharp flexible style, like a clean blade, cuts away all frippery.

But why argue? The lovers of poetry, honest lovers of life as it is, in its frank crudity, its amazing loveliness—life which the others are forever chasing after to swaddle in all sorts of archaic and foolish decencies—such find out these things for themselves; they know, they don't have to be told; the others refuse to listen, spoiled children that *will* have everything blurred and attenuated by the drawing-room derivative. But perhaps they have weak eyes—it might be unkind to deprive them of their amiable amber spectacles.

CLARA SHANAFELT.

CANTON, OHIO.

[We fancy Mr. Gilman would reply that he cheerfully admits the "unexcelled imaginative justness of language" disclosed in the excerpts from the *Spoon River Anthology* adduced by our correspondent,—and to be found as well in other passages from that remarkable work; but that it requires something besides "unexcelled imaginative justness of language" to turn what is essentially emotional prose into authentic poetry. No doubt he would agree with her profound and clarifying observation that "the speech of literature evolves and varies"; and we have as little doubt that his admiration for the genius exhibited in the *Spoon River Anthology* will remain unaffected by our correspondent's imputation to it of characteristics which it does not possess. As for our correspondent's disturbing intimation that the literary critic of the REVIEW is of those who would swaddle life in "all sorts of archaic and foolish decencies," we confess that his inclinations in this direction have thus far escaped our notice.—EDITOR.]

MORE FROM MR. PINGREE, OF MANCHESTER, N. H.

SIR,—I see that you have tried to make me out a "man without a country" by your ingenious dropping of the address from my letter, and by the heading which you give to it. Will you hear my protest, Colonel Harvey, for I don't feel a bit like the Galilean? I am *not* "beyond the aid of maps."

Let me refer to your words on page 337 in the September issue; it is there you have put your sword-point through the heart of this troublous matter. "But there is another phase which, though less pitiful and heart-rending, bears a much wider significance. It relates to the value of American citizenship and directly concerns the honor of the nation. Must Americans hereafter regard themselves as men without a country? That is the vital question now raised for the first time in the history of the Republic. . . ."

Is not the question, rather, "What are the respective limits of individual and collective responsibility?" Americans (to allow you the word) can never be without a country. Their country is as secure as the Israel of the prophets. Indeed, it may be the Israel of the prophets, but no matter. Are wealthy travelers to foreign lands and poor business men with foreign interests, to serve the nation or be served by it—are they to serve to the death or be served to the death? There is another statement of the question, preferable, I think, to yours.